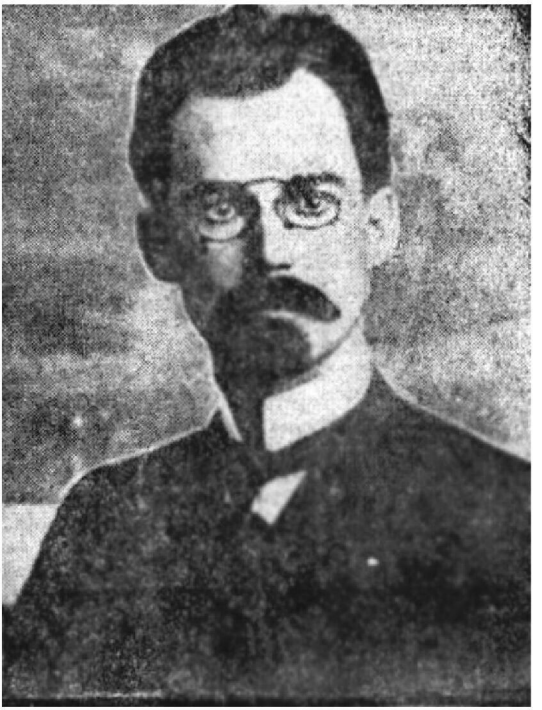
THE REVOLT
on the
ARMOURED CRUISER
POTEMKIN



S. I. Kanatchikov

THE REVOLT ON THE ARMOURED CRUISER "POTEMKIN"

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THE YEAR 1905

The revolt of the armoured cruiser *Potemkin* was but one of the links in the long chain of the development of the first Russian Revolution—the Revolution of 1905. This revolution was the first lesson in the revolutionary fight—and a tremendous object lesson it was—for the broad masses of workers and peasants.

The Revolution of 1905 brought face to face the struggling classes, the capitalists and workers, the landlords and peasants, the tsarist monarchy with its powerful apparatus of oppression, and the revolutionary masses. It compelled various classes, parties and groups to state openly for the first time—in the press, at meetings—what their attitude was to the tsarist monarchy, on which side they were going to fight, also, whom they were going to support in the fight. In a brief period, this revolution taught even the most backward masses of the workers that they could not improve or remedy their lot by means of humble petitions and prayers. It opened the eyes of the masses to the fact, that the chief enemy of the workers and peasants was the tsarist government, together with the landlords and the capitalists, and that this enemy could only be overthrown by violence, by an armed struggle.

Before January 9, 1905, with the exception of a small vanguard composed of the class-conscious minority, the great masses of the workers, even in St. Petersburg, still had a blind faith in the tsar, and believed that in reply to their peaceful entreaties and solicitations, he would grant a number of reforms which would ameliorate their condition. Under the leadership of the priest Gapon, they marched in a great mass of 200,000 people to the tsar's palace, intending to see and speak to the tsar himself and present their demands in the form of a petition. However, as we know, the tsar did not dare to face even this loyal patriotic procession of workers, but gave orders that soldiers be stationed to

prevent all access to him. When the workers attempted to make their way to the palace, the soldiers opened fire and over a thousand people were killed and injured. Such was the heavy price which the backward workers paid for their faith in the tsar. They now understood, as the result of their own experience, that the tsar was their most ferocious enemy, and that they would have to improve their situation not by means of petitions, but by struggle.

The events in St. Petersburg roused the working masses, and continuous strikes took place all over Russia throughout 1905—not only in the big works and factories, but also in the small handicraft workshops, where the workers were especially ignorant and uncultured, and their situation particularly unbearable.

In 1904 the tsarist government, in pursuance of its imperialist designs and for the purpose of enriching individual members of the governing clique, engaged in war with Japan, hoping in this way also to divert the brewing revolutionary storm at home. The war demanded ever-increasing sacrifices from the peasants and workers, and at the same time exposed the utter rottenness and incompetence of the tsarist government. The embezzlers of the government funds, the plunderers of the national wealth—the officials and the generals—reduced the armed forces of tsarism to such a state that the army met defeat after defeat, and the newly built navy was sunk in a single day by the Japanese in the battle of Tsu Simo.

The war became hateful not only to the workers and peasants, but even to the bourgeoisie, who raised loud protests against the government and the incapacity of the rulers.

Stagnation and crisis in industry, accentuated by the war, made the atmosphere even tenser. The cost of living rose from day to day. The discontent among the masses grew wider and deeper. The broad masses of the people unanimously hoped for the defeat of the tsarist army and demanded the rapid ending of the war. This tense situation in the country was bound to have its effect on the army and navy, which consisted principally of peasants and workers. The soldiers and sailors began to be infected with the growing discontent of the masses, and everywhere there was fer-

ment among the troops. A revolutionary movement grew up among the advanced sections of the army, which had become highly responsive to revolutionary propaganda and agitation.

The tremendous wave of strikes which broke out in the towns, was joined by the peasant agrarian movement in the villages, and this shook the stability of the firmest and the last bulwark of tsarism—the tsarist army.

A series of military revolts broke out in the army and navy. One of the most prominent of these, and the one that is best known in the history of the 1905 Revolution, was the mutiny of the armoured cruiser *Potemkin* of the Black Sea Fleet.

Our Party was in contact with the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet, and made preparations for a general mutiny in the navy, to take place somewhat later at the time of the naval manoeuvres. However, the incredibly hard and oppressive conditions of life, and the inhuman and humiliating treatment of the sailors by the naval officers, caused the revolt to break out on the *Potemkin* before the expected date.

Here is the story of the initial stages of this mutiny from a description by one of its foremost leaders, Afanasy Matiushenko, the torpedo quartermaster.

THE STORY OF MATIUSHENKO

In June, the squadron was awaiting orders to sail for Sebastopol for practice manoeuvres. On June 13, the *Potemkin,* an armoured cruiser of the squadron, which had just been refitted, was ordered to proceed to Tendra Island for gun and target practice. This isolation of the *Potemkin,* served as the indirect cause which upset the arranged plan of revolt.

When the *Potemkin* arrived at Tendra Strait (June 13), Torpedo-boat No. 267 which accompanied it, was sent to Odessa for provisions, and on the evening of the same day, returned with supplies which were duly trans-shipped to the cruiser. The meat for the soup was hung up on hooks on the spar deck. Early in the morning of June 14, during the

usual cleaning of the ship, one of the sailors noticed that there were maggots in the meat. The discovery was soon made known to the whole crew. Groups of sailors began to gather round the meat, and muttered curses and threats.

"Those scoundrels of officers don't want to pay attention to the sailors' food."

"Show it to the doctor, and let him have it thrown overboard."

When Golikov, the captain of the *Potemkin* heard of the unrest among the crew, he sent the senior ship surgeon, Smirnov, to examine the meat. The surgeon approached, put on his pince-nez so as to see the maggots better, sniffed at the meat and said that is was very good, that the crew was merely finicky and therefore did not want to eat it. All that was necessary was to wash off the maggots with water, and the meat would be excellent. After this decision by the senior surgeon, Captain Golikov ordered a sentry to be stationed by the meat, to write down the names of all who came to look at it, and afterwards to report the names to him.

The crew knew well the habits and views of the Captain, and was afraid to approadh the meat. The Captain ordered dinner to be prepared, but the excitement among the sailors did not die down.

"How can we serve in the navy now? How can we fight, when the prisoners in Japan are better treated than we are?"

At the usual hour the call to "dine and wine" was sounded, but one part of the call remained unanswered. Every sailor took a piece of bread and a mug of water, dipped the bread in the water and let this serve as his dinner. The cauldrons of soup which had been put out in the caboose were left untouched. This was reported to the Captain, and immediately Chief Officer Giliarovsky was sent to restore order. In reply to the question of the senior officer as to why the crew did not eat their dinner, the cook replied that they did not want the soup and asked for tea and bread and butter. Captain Golikov had by that time arrived and when he heard from the Chief Officer what the trouble was, he turned to the sailors.

"Why don't you eat the soup?"

Voices from the crowd of sailors answered:

"Eat it yourself, and we will eat bread and water."

The officers decided to take drastic measures. Golikov ordered all hands on deck and had the whole crew drawn up in front of him. He then addressed them.

"I have repeatedly stated that disorders of this nature are inadmissible on a warship of the navy. For such things your kind can be strung up there," he pointed to the yardarm. "Now, men, whoever is willing to eat the soup, step forward."

Only the "long service men", the boatswains and some of the petty officers responded; the mass of sailors remained immobile. Golikov gave another command.

"Turn out the guard!" Immediately, the guard armed with rifles was drawn up before the sailors. The next moment, the sailors, expecting arrest and possible shooting, ran to the gun tower in a disorderly crowd. Chief Officer Giliarovsky, attempted to catch at least some of the "guilty" persons. Together with the officer of the watch, he barred the path of those sailors who had no time to join their comrades (thirty in all). He ordered the guard to surround them.

The crew stood there, pale and terribly excited, watching their comrades surrounded by the guard. The deadly silence was broken by the voice of the Chief Officer: "Boatswain, hand out the tarpaulin."

The command given to the boatswain meant that these comrades would be covered with a tarpaulin, and, in this helpless situation, would be shot down. The infamous order decided the matter. Matiushenko stepped out in front of the sailors, and appealed to the guard:

"Comrades, don't forget our oath—not to shoot our own men."

The muzzles of the rifles dropped to the deck—the guard refused to fire on their comrades. Next minute there was a shout:

"Comrades, look what they want to do to our fellows. Grab the rifles and cartridges—shoot them down, the swine!"

This was the same Matiushenko, and his call served as a signal for revolt. As if they had been waiting for the com-

mand, all the sailors rushed to the gun deck, seized rifles, loaded them, and ran out to join their surrounded comrades.

The sailors who were running with loaded rifles to liberate the prisoners were met with threats and curses by the Captain and the Chief Officer. But in reply, a loud "Hurrah" ran through the *Potemkin*, and shouts of "Long live freedom! Down with the war! Down with the tsar!"

Captain Golikov threw himself on Matiushenko with the order "Drop your weapons," and was told "I will drop my weapons when I am no longer alive but a corpse. Get off the ship. This is the people's ship and not yours."

The Captain fled. The revolt spread like wildfire, and shots and volleys could be heard.

The mighty force of the spontaneous outburst can be understood from the fact that even the religious sectarian sailors took part in the shooting, though up to that time, in frequent discussions with the Captain of the *Potemkin*, they had stubbornly opposed "shooting at their fellow men."

Chief Artillery Officer Neopkoev, who was in company with the Captain, fell under the bullets of the rebels, and immediately afterwards, Chief Officer Giliarovsky was killed. He had been found by Matiushenko with a rifle in his hands at a gun-tower standing over the corpse of the sailor Vakulinchuk whom he had killed, and who had been among those who were sentenced to be shot. Giliarovsky shot at Matiushenko but missed. He turned to flee, but Matiushenko's bullet finished him. The bodies of the officers who had been killed were thrown overboard. . . .

. . . . It was a terrible but triumphant picture. Eight hundred men shouting: "Death to the tyrants! Long live freedom!" Shots rattled in the direction of the officers who were trying to save themselves by swimming to the Torpedo-boat No. 267.

A torpedo officer, Lieutenant Ton, came towards the sailors. The crew, recognising an officer who had been brutal to them shouted, "Overboard with him!" But Ton came up to Matiushenko and said, "I want to speak to you." Matiushenko asked the sailors to stand on one side and went with Ton to the gun-turret. Ton at that moment pulled out his revolver and fired at the man who had trusted him. His

bullet wounded a nearby sailor in the arm. The next moment the officer fell under a hail of bullets.

Then came the turn of the Captain. At first he hid in the Admiral's cabin, but seeing the hopelessness of the situation, he came on deck to express his belated repentance. Evidently looking on Matiushenko as the leader of the revolt, the Captain of the *Potemkin* rushed to him, threw his arms round his knees, and cried:

"I am greatly to blame for my attitude to the crew. Forgive me, old boy."

"Personally, I have nothing against you, it depends on the crew."

"Hang him on the yardarm!" shouted the crew. "He threatened us with the yardarm."

"Don't waste time," voices were heard. "Shoot him."

The tyrant Captain was led away, a volley was heard, and the corpse of Golikov was thrown overboard. He was the last.

Meanwhile, the officers who had swum to Torpedo-boat No. 267 urged the ship to hasten her escape. The ship had already raised anchor so as to steam to Sebastopol, but shots from the 47 mm. and 75 mm. guns of the cruiser made her stop, and at the command of the *Potemkin,* Torpedo-boat No. 267 came alongside the mutinous cruiser. The Captain and two other officers were taken from the Torpedo-boat but the demand of part of the crew to throw them overboard was not supported by the majority.

"Overboard with them all!" cried some sailors, indignant at their attempts to escape on the Torpedo-boat. But other voices were heard: "There has been enough bloodshed. The ship is now in our hands and these creatures are not dangerous to us. Let us swab the decks." The crew obeyed. They limited themselves to arresting the officers from the Torpedo-boat and locking them in a cabin. Several other officers who were found on quarter-deck where they had hidden themselves in their fright at the moment of the revolt, were added to the prisoners in the cabin. Twelve persons were arrested in all, and their fate was to be decided later. . . . . After the officers and those of the petty officers who were not thoroughly trusted, had been arrested, and the

sailors had become complete masters of the powerful cruiser, the stokers began to raise steam, while the crew cleared the ship for action, in expectation of the meeting with the squadron, which had remained in Sebastopol.

From the *Potemkin* the Red Flag fluttered victoriously. It sailed to Odessa. . . .

THE *POTEMKIN* AT ODESSA

Having risen and seized control of the ship, the sailors of the *Potemkin* elected a Ship's Committee consisting of twelve men who henceforth took command of the cruiser.

The first decision of the Committee was to sail for Odessa, to get into contact with the workers, and after receiving reinforcements to take further action.

At the time when the events described were taking place on the *Potemkin,* a fierce struggle was being waged in Odessa between the workers and the capitalists, which began as a general strike and, spontaneously passed over into an armed rebellion.

Owing to the poor state of organisation of the proletariat in Odessa, the events took place spontaneously. This was inevitable, since most of the industry in Odessa consisted of small plants. The following organisations existed there, each of them claiming the leading role: (1) the committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (the Bolsheviks); (2) the group following the Mensheviks; (3) the Jewish Bund Committee; (4) the committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party; (5) a group of Anarchist Communists, and (6) the Poale Zionist group. All these organisations were hostile to each other, and struggled for supremacy.

The Bolsheviks were organised best of all. They advocated an armed insurrection, whereas the Mensheviks were trying to direct the movement along peaceful lines. However, even the Bolsheviks were not strong enough to get the movement into their hands. For several days there had been clashes between the workers, the troops and police. Several workers had been killed and wounded by the sabres of the Cossacks and the bullets of the gendarmes. Desperation had reached a tremendous height. The workers demanded arms, but there

were none. With the arrival of the *Potemkin,* the course of events changed radically. The feeling of the workers became bold and confident.

When the workers learned of the events which had taken place on the ship, they welcomed the arrival of the *Potemkin* with tremendous enthusiasm. The Ship's Committee of the *Potemkin* decided: (1) to send parties on shore early in the morning to buy provisions; (2) to get the necessary amount of coal; (3) to send the body of Vakulinchuk on shore with a manifesto to the population; (4) to draw up a detailed statement of the events at Tendra and to examine all the officers; (5) to draw up an appeal to the population of Odessa, to the Cossacks, to the French Consul, and (6) to get into contact with the Social-Democratic Parties. A decision was also made to put on shore those officers who would not agree to support the "cause of the people." Only a few officers who agreed to help the revolutionary cause, remained on the cruiser. The engineer, Kovalenko, Lieutenant Kaluzhny and Doctor Galenko, who deliberately joined the rebels so as to betray them later, were set free. Midshipman Alexeyev, who had been set free previously, was appointed Captain of the ship to act under the observation of the crew; he also became a provocateur to save his own skin.

Early in the morning of June 15, three sailors went on shore for provisions. They carried out their tasks without difficulty. The body of Vakulinchuk was carried ashore and put into a tent made of sails. On his breast, over his crossed hands, was put the appeal to the population of Odessa.

A. P. Brzhezovsky, one of the participants in the revolt, in his book *Eleven Days on the Potemkin,* describes the events around the body of Vakulinchuk:

". . . . A tremendous crowd gathered so that it was impossible to move. Everyone wanted to look at the dead man. Many people approached, took off their hats, crossed themselves and bowed down to the earth before the victim of savagery and tyranny. Women wept and kissed the hand of the dead warrior of the people. Sobs were heard, and there were tears in the eyes of many men. Near the tent, on a heap of barrels and on every available platform, orators were speaking on behalf of the various revolutionary groups.

Fierce and passionate speeches poured forth to the tremendous gathering of people. Merciless exposures of the barbarity and the bloodshed caused by the government, were drowned from time to time by thunderous applause and revolutionary shouts: "We have waited long enough! Death to the tyrants! We will die for freedom!" Faces were bright with earnestness, indignation burned in breasts, and everywhere could be felt a determination and readiness to march immediately to the fight. Involuntarily I gave way to the general excitement and rushed to the platform.

" 'Comrades!' I shouted, 'there are thousands of us here, and we cannot bear the slavery and oppression of the government any longer. Let us gather the workers from the ships and all the workers from the ports, and let us march into the town. With arms in our hands and under the protection of the sailors, we shall win our freedom, we shall win a better life.'

"A deafening roar arose before I could finish. The whole crowd moved as one man through the port, past the ships, whose sailors came to us and joined the procession. Hundreds of whistles were sounding wildly. The crowd flowed like a wave engulfing everyone into its ranks as it moved along."

When the Ship's Committee heard that on the previous day, during a demonstration, the Cossacks had fired into the crowd, it sent a proclamation to the Cossacks and soldiers on behalf of the crew of the *Potemkin*.

"The sailors of the *Potemkin* appeal to you, soldiers and Cossacks, to put down your weapons and to let us win freedom for the people. We request the peaceful citizens of Odessa to move off further away because in case of any violence being attempted against us, we will reduce the city to a heap of ruins."

The commander of the troops in Odessa, General Kokhanov did not trust the troops and applied for reinforcements from some neighbouring towns. Martial law was proclaimed in Odessa. The authorities attempted to seize the body of Vakulinchuk and to drive off the guard, but the crew of the *Potemkin* prevented this ruse.

In order to work out a general plan of action, the Ship's Committee got into contact with the Social-Democratic organisations of Odessa, and asked them to send representatives on board the cruiser. A preliminary meeting of representatives of three organisations—Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the Bund—prepared a plan which they intended to submit to the sailors of the *Potemkin*.

According to this plan, it was decided to land a strong party of sailors, who would march at the head of a demonstration of thousands of workers, towards the main square of the town to bury their dead comrade. At the first clash with the troops, the sailors would call on the soldiers to fraternise with them and to come over to the side of the people. In addition to getting the soldiers on their side, one of the main tasks would be to disorganise all the resources which the authorities possessed to crush the rebellion—destruction of the telegraph and telephone wires, tearing up of the railway lines, the arrest of all government officials, the liberation of prisoners from the prisons, etc. The cruiser would remain as a threat to the town all the time and would fire warning shots. In case of anything going wrong it would begin to bombard it. Four representatives were chosen to go to the cruiser and inform the sailors of this plan, but in view of the fact that the circumstances were changing every minute, they were given powers to change the plan of action to suit any new conditions.

When they arrived at the cruiser, the representatives put their plan before a meeting of the Ship's Committee. But the plan proved inexpedient. The sailors were opposed to an armed descent on the town; they said that the crew of the ship should not be split, because there would not be sufficient men left to serve the ship and keep it ready for action. Besides, if they were separated, and the boldest and most reliable sent on shore, those who were left on board might not act with sufficient determination at some critical moment. They were strong only if they remained united.

Many Social-Democratic workers came with the representatives of the organisations and related the events in the town. The more backward of the sailors, under the provocation of the petty officers who had been liberated from ar-

rest, began to show their dissatisfaction at the presence of "strangers" on the ship, saying that the events on the *Potemkin* only concerned the crew. As a result, the sitting of the Committee was broken up, and it was decided to leave only a few comrades on the cruiser while the remainder should leave for the time being.

On the evening of June 15, the *Potemkin* captured a small war vessel, the *Vekha,* which was bound from Nikolayev to Odessa. It was converted into a hospital ship; the Captain and the officers were arrested, disarmed, and put on shore, while the crew joined the sailors of the *Potemkin.*

On the same day, a delegation from two regiments, the "Ismail" and the "Danube" regiments, arrived at the ship, and on behalf of the organised part of the soldiers, stated that they were prepared to join the crew of the *Potemkin* as soon as the latter took decisive action.

"Comrades, we will support you on shore. No longer are we prepared to kill peasants or workers, and we shall not fire on you if you come to occupy the town."

Besides these friendly visits, the gendarmes and the police made attempts to get on to the *Potemkin,* but were compelled to throw their swords into the water and beat a retreat.

Meanwhile, bloody events were taking place in the town and port. The army command and the police lost their heads at first, but when they saw the inaction of the *Potemkin,* they began to rally their forces and prepared for a new slaughter. As darkness fell, attempts were made to start a Jewish pogrom, but without success. One of the speakers who was calling for the pogrom, was badly beaten and another was killed by a shot from the crowd. Then the provocateurs turned all their energy to the port. The police got cases of vodka ready to make the backward elements of dockers and tramps drunk, so as to get them to participate later in the pogrom. When the meetings near the body of Vakulinchuk were over, the crowd that remained at the port consisted mostly of curious middle-class elements and tramps. There were very few workers and all their attempts to hold back the crowd or to interfere with it were hopeless. The drunken throngs went to the liquor stores, and after

a speech from some unknown person with a direct appeal to plunder, they began to break up and burn everything which came under their hands. A big fire began in the port and a panic started. The fire brigade arrived, but the police compelled it to turn back. The wild and drink-maddened crowds were at the mercy of the flames. The soldiers who were on hand, began to shoot right and left at everyone. Here is how one of the eye-witnesses described the events of that night: "Volley after volley was fired at the thousands of people who were looting the storehouses. The soldiers fired with rifles and machine-guns. They fired on all sides . . . the cannonade continued through the whole night. Horror followed on horror. . . ."

The police discovered a crowd of workers who were trying to make their way through the town They sent soldiers against them, describing them as looters, and many were killed as the result of the shooting. At the same time, in a Jewish quarter of Odessa—Moldavanka—the police openly commenced a Jewish pogrom.

About 2,000 persons were killed in the shooting or perished in the flames.

The morning did not bring a return of quiet. The fire in the port was still smouldering, the corpses had not been removed from the sea-front, and Cossack patrols were shooting people who went to the smoking ruins to seek for their dead relatives.

The funeral of Gregory Vakulinchuk took place on the same morning. In spite of the fact that martial law had been declared in the town, in spite of the bloody events of the preceding night, the commander of the troops permitted the funeral procession to pass through the whole town, insisting only that the delegation from the *Potemkin* be restricted to twelve sailors (the sailors had demanded that one hundred of them should take part in the funeral procession), and that these should be unarmed. But the safety and freedom of the delegates was guaranteed, so great was the fear of the authorities before the *Potemkin*.

Matiushenko describes the funeral of Vakulinchuk as follows:

"I have never seen such a solemn sight as the funeral of our dear comrade, or so many genuine tears as were shed over the body of an unknown sailor. When we left the boat and came on shore there was a mass of people near the body of Vakulinchuk, just as on the previous day. Immediately several persons lifted the stretcher with the body and the long procession marched through the town in the direction of the cemetery. Recruits joined us all along our route. On the balconies, in the windows and on the roofs of the houses, there were crowds of people. Shouts could be heard: 'All honour to the dead hero! Down with the tyrants! Long live the *Potemkin*!'

"This continued along the whole route, until the procession had passed through the town and arrived at the cemetery.

"After the funeral we drove back to the port, but on the way we were stopped by a company of soldiers which blocked the road. We were in a hurry and continued our journey on foot. But as soon as we drew level with the soldiers, a signal was given, and they opened fire on us. We were unarmed, and could do nothing but run. I was behind the others and saw that no one had been killed, although bullets pierced my trousers. I think that the soldiers deliberately fired wildly. However, when we arrived at the landing stage, there were only nine of us. I do not know what happened to the other three."

In the evening of the same day, the *Potemkin* began to bombard the town.

It has not been discovered exactly why this bombardment was begun. One of the participants in the rebellion, Kovalenko, explains it by saying that the crew of the *Potemkin* wished to help the workers of Odessa who were being threatened with shooting at the orders of the Military Council.

Five shots in all were fired from the guns of the *Potemkin* —three blank shots and two 6-inch shells. The firing was supposed to be aimed at the Town Theatre where the Military Council, headed by the commander of the troops, was in session. But the shells did not reach their target owing to the deliberately inaccurate aim of the spy and traitor, Signaller Bedermeyer.

In spite of the fact that the shells did not reach their mark, they roused tremendous enthusiasm among the working masses of Odessa, inspiring them with hopes of victory.

THE CRUISER *GEORGE THE CONQUEROR* JOINS THE *POTEMKIN*

Early in the morning of June 17, a cipher telegram was intercepted, showing that the Black Sea squadron was drawing near to the *Potemkin*. At the orders of the Ship's Committee, the emergency steamer, *Smely*, was seized for scouting purposes. The whole of the crew was taken from the ship and replaced by sailors from the *Potemkin*, and the steamer itself was sent to scout in the direction of Tendra Strait. On returning, the scout gave information that the squadron was in sight not far off. It was evident that the squadron had been sent from Sebastopol to quell the mutiny on the *Potemkin*. In order to give an accurate description of the events and details of the preparations which were made we will quote the words of one of the sailors of the cruiser *Rostislav*, who later fled abroad:

"On June 21, the squadron was to have proceeded to Tendra Island to join the *Potemkin* for manoeuvres. On June 15, a signal was raised, unexpectedly for all, from the flagship *Rostislav:* 'The Admiral requests all the captains to come to the flagship,' and a second signal to the cruisers *Holy Trinity, Twelve Apostles, George the Conqueror, Catherine II,* to get up steam and prepare to sail.

"The sailors were astonished at this, because everyone knew that we were due to go to Tendra Island on the 21st. Some of them began to guess that something had gone wrong on the *Potemkin,* while others maintained that this was merely a practice manoeuvre and nothing else. In short, the forecastle split into several groups, each putting its own interpretation on the proposed cruise.

"Meanwhile, the captains gathered together. Their meeting lasted two hours. We do not know what was said, but after the meeting another signal was raised: 'The *Catherine II* is not to leave port.' We afterwards learned the reason for this from the comrades on the *Catherine II.* On the pre-

vious day, *i.e.*, the evening of June 14, the crew of the *Catherine II*, having sung their prayers in a half-hearted way, absolutely refused to sing 'god save the tsar.' When five or six singers nevertheless began chanting the prayer the others started to whistle and howl. When the Captain appeared, the crew made demands of a purely economic character. He became confused and hurried into his cabin. That was why the *Catherine II* did not sail with the squadron.

"At 11 o'clock at night, the three cruisers *Holy Trinity, George the Conqueror,* and the *Twelve Apostles,* together with the light cruiser *Kazersky* and four torpedo-boats, left under the command of Vice-Admiral Vishnevsky. The next day, *i.e.*, June 16, at about 11 o'clock in the morning, a signal was raised: '*The Rostislav* and the *Sinop* to get up steam and prepare to sail.' They began to prepare. They took provisions for three days and weighed anchor soon after 6 o'clock.

"All this time the officers were terribly uneasy, walking about in a dispirited manner and whispering together. The class-conscious sailors of whom there were only about ten on the *Rostislav,* guessed that we were going against the *Potemkin* and began to agitate openly, thus falling into the hands of the authorities. I was one of them, but I afterwards escaped. The agitation was not very successful. The majority did not believe that the *Potemkin* had gone over to the side of the people, but when at last we managed to convince many of them, they replied: 'If it is true that we are going against the *Potemkin,* we will refuse to fire on her, because her sailors are our brothers.

"Shortly after 9 o'clock in the morning we approached Tendra Island to join the squadron which had left before us, but it was not there. On the horizon, in the direction of Odessa, moving wisps of smoke could be seen. It was our squadron. We followed and joined it at 11 o'clock. The captains of all the ships gathered for a meeting on the flagship *Rostislav.* We heard from the sailors who rowed our Captain to the flagship, that the *Potemkin* was in Odessa, and that when they had tried to approach Odessa, she had raised the signal: 'Surrender or we will fire.' They hurriedly retreated.

"The meeting of captains lasted not more than half an hour. Then the squadron drew up in battle line and set out for Odessa at a speed of ten knots. Soon after 1 o'clock the shore came in sight, and the smoke from the *Potemkin* could be seen."

The meeting of the *Potemkin* with the squadron is described by Kovalenko as follows:

"Every minute they drew closer. Soon they were so near that we could distinguish the ships. The cruisers *Rostislav* and *Sinop* had just joined the squadron. All the ships were steaming towards us, drawn up in two columns. In front were the armoured cruisers and the light cruisers and behind were the torpedo-boat destroyers. The *Potemkin* accompanied by the torpedo-boat, which kept close alongside of it all the time, drove straight at the middle of the first column. Soon it was possible to distinguish that the ships of the squadron, like the *Potemkin* were cleared for action. The boat davits had been taken down and the guns were pointing out over the sides. But when the squadron was 100—150 fathoms away from the *Potemkin*, some movement could be observed among the crews on the *George the Conqueror*, the *Twelve Apostles* and the *Sinop*.

"Crowds of sailors rushed up through the hatchways and soon the decks of the cruisers were covered with them. We had already drawn level with the squadron and the *Potemkin* cut through the middle of it. The guns of the *Potemkin* were slowly directed towards the passing ships. The *Rostislav* and the *Holy Trinity* were passed in dead silence, but on the decks of the remaining cruisers the crew could be seen in obvious disorder. Suddenly from the upper deck of the *Potemkin* rang out the cry: 'Long live freedom! Hurrah!' In answer a mighty 'Hurrah' burst like thunder from the three cruisers.

"Fearing that the mutiny would spread through the whole squadron, Admiral Krieger ordered the ships to steer at full speed back to Sebastopol."

The *Potemkin* once more cut through the lines of the squadron and turned sharply in chase.

One of the cruisers suddenly separated from the squadron, turned around, and steered straight at the *Potemkin*. The

signaller of the *Potemkin* distinguished the name by means of his telescope. It was the *George the Conqueror,* the same ship whose crew had refused to take part in the unrest in the naval barracks at Sebastopol in November 1904. Since then there had been bad blood between the crews of the *Potemkin* who had taken part in the affair and the *George the Conqueror.*

Naturally the crew of the *Potemkin* had no reason to trust the *George the Conqueror*—to believe that its intentions were peaceful. Not wishing to allow the ship to approach too close, the *Potemkin* signalled it to cast anchor.

The *George the Conqueror* stopped and began to signal by semaphore. "The crew of the *George the Conqueror* requests *Potemkin* to send some comrades on board." Still uncertain of the real intentions of the *George the Conqueror,* the *Potemkin* replied: "Arrest your officers, and send delegates to us." To these demands, the signaller replied: "Things are going badly here We are not all agreed. We cannot manage ourselves. Send help quickly."

The members of the Ship's Committee of the *Potemkin* armed with rifles and revolvers, went over on the torpedo-boat to the *George the Conqueror.* Their determination and boldness, effected the arrest of the officers of the *George the Conqueror* who were immediately put ashore. Then the *George the Conqueror* joined the *Potemkin.* While carrying out this operation of clearing out the counter-revolutionary officers, a tremendous mistake was made, that afterwards destroyed the whole revolt, which had commenced so brilliantly.

Some of the Potemkinites were so incautious as to believe the assurances of the good-natured sailors of the *George the Conqueror,* that the petty officers on their ship were reliable. Therefore these hypocrites were not put on shore together with the officers and were not even arrested, but were left at complete liberty to carry on quiet counter-revolutionary agitation.

The tremendous victory of the cruiser *Potemkin* increased its strength, and at the same time raised the spirits of the crew and gave them the hope of successfully completing the mutiny, which had begun so well. This victory not only

brought joy to the crew of the *Potemkin*, but also to the workers in Odessa, whose spirits rose once again, who once more hoped for a favourable conclusion to their struggle. Kirill, one of the participants in the mutiny of the *Potemkin*, describes the state of affairs on the *Potemkin* after it had been joined by the *George the Conqueror*.

"Our minds were at ease, and the constant nightmare of fear that our action would fail, was replaced by a complete confidence in a rapid victory over our ancient enemy, and the apostles of darkness and violence.

"Now we had our own revolutionary squadron—two cruisers with six 12-inch guns, a torpedo-boat and the *Vekha*. Under such conditions, the idea of establishing political freedom for all South Russia and extending it over the whole of Russia seemed perfectly feasible, and in our thoughts we were already living in the new kingdom of liberty.

"Tomorrow we shall go to Odessa and take it, establish a free government, enlist in our cause the free soldiers, organise a people's army, march on Kiev, Kharkov and other towns, win to our side the peasant masses in the villages, and then proceed to the Caucasus along the shores of the Black Sea, and everywhere announce independence and freedom from the old chains of slavery! Then to Moscow and St. Petersburg!"

But unfortunately, all these were mere dreams, phantasies, having no connection with reality. Our people argued, discussed, raved, expressed the most florid dreams, but they very slightly understood the real state of affairs, what should be done, how to fight against the enemy, how to act so as to overcome the powerful enemy.

The enemies—the servants of the tsarist autocracy did not at all feel like victors. Depression reigned among them. Nevertheless, in most cases the servants of the tsar were men of action, practical men, and therefore they energetically organised resistance to the mutinous sailors, who threatened to make an end to their rule.

General Kakhanov describes the events at Odessa as follows:

"During June 16 and 17, I was visited by the Consuls of France, Germany, Great Britain, Austria and Italy. They

expressed anxiety for the safety of the consulates and for their nationals, and also demanded various explanations. I told the Consuls that they should apply for explanations to Yurenev, the agent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whom I would keep informed as to the course of events in Odessa. To guard the consulates, I appointed two infantry soldiers to each of the eighteen consulates in Odessa.

"When it was discovered in the evening that the crew of the *George the Conqueror* had also mutinied, and that the squadron had returned to Sebastopol, without crushing the crew of the *Potemkin,* but had even reinforced it by a cruiser, I had to reckon without the help of the Admiralty in my further actions; I had to fight against the two cruisers with my forces alone. I ordered the second battalion of sappers to be brought from camp, to erect a battery on the Javakha Hill for eight 9-inch mortars. I directed this battery to be armed with guns, ordering shells to be brought for these guns from Ochakov, and also brought the commander of the engineer battalion from that fort to decide whether it was possible to blow up the mutinous cruisers by means of the equipment at Ochakov. Finally, a telegram was sent to the War Minister, with a request for some long-range guns."

As the reader will see, though the enemy did not feel himself to be in good shape, nevertheless, preparations for the forthcoming struggle were carried on in a businesslike and well thought out manner. Comrade Lenin has repeatedly pointed out in his numerous articles on the preparation for an armed rebellion, that we have much to learn from our enemies, because it is only by learning and adapting the methods and means of planned preparations for war and planned warfare, that we can defeat and overcome our enemy, the autocracy.

THE DESERTION OF *GEORGE THE CONQUEROR* AND THE END OF THE REVOLT

July 18 was the culminating point in the history of the revolt on the cruiser *Potemkin,* and at the same time marked the turn of the tide in the direction of the downfall and disintegration of the revolt. During the night, the situation on

the *George the Conqueror* had changed considerably for the worse. As was to be expected, the hypocritical counter-revolutionary petty officers who had been left at liberty, openly began to urge the crew to return to Sebastopol. They succeeded in splitting the crew into two sections, one of which was openly hostile to the *Potemkin,* the other, undecided and hesitating. The Ship's Committee of the *Potemkin,* hearing of the state of affairs, decided to send a deputation of several sailors to the *George* with an armed guard to arrest the petty officers and bring them to the *Potemkin.*

Unfortunately for the deputation, two sailors who were almost unknown, and Doctor Galenko, accompanied it. From the very beginning, Galenko had been planning treachery.

Matiushenko and Kirill were unable to go with the deputation. They had completely lost their voices after addressing so many meetings. As for other energetic representatives, Doctor Galenko, though not objecting to their coming, nevertheless arranged matters in such a way that they were not included in the delegation.

When the delegation from the *Potemkin* arrived at the *George,* Doctor Galenko suddenly and impudently announced to the sailors that the crew of the *Potemkin* had decided to surrender, and had asked the crew of the *George* to go with them to Sebastopol; that only a few men who kept the whole crew in their hands wished to fight any longer, but that in a day or two the sailors would overthrow their power and return to Sebastopol.

Such a speech from the accredited representatives of the *Potemkin* produced a disastrous effect on the crew and irretrievably decided the whole matter. Doctor Galenko was energetically assisted in his treachery and provocation by the petty officers and by the boatswain, Kuzmin.

It was decided to return immediately to Sebastopol. Steam was raised on the *George the Conqueror,* and it steered for the open sea. The *Potemkin* began to raise threatening signals but the *George* continued to steam ahead. Then the *Potemkin* hoisted its battle-flag and the *George the Conqueror* turned sharply around, headed for the harbour and ran on to a shoal.

Naturally, the *Potemkin* should have immediately sent the torpedo-boat to the *George the Conqueror* to arrest the petty officers, to put guards at the guns, and then should have compelled one of the steamers in the harbour to tow the cruiser off the shoals. But the ruling power—the Ship's Committee did nothing. Their feelings had fallen catastrophically. A pitiful confusion reigned.

Suddenly a shout was heard "Sail to Roumania," and in a minute or two almost all the crew, shaken by the treachery of the *George the Conqueror* repeated these words. Even Matiushenko gave way to feelings of despair and began to repeat the ominous "To Roumania."

The order was given to raise steam, and as soon as the deputation returned from the *George the Conqueror,* of course without the provocateur Doctor Galenko, the *Potemkin* set out in the direction of Roumania. It was only a few hours after her departure that a small training ship, the *Prut* arrived at Odessa to join her. The quality of the crew of the *Prut* from the point of view of revolutionary preparation, was fairly high, and therefore as soon as they had heard of the mutiny of the *Potemkin,* they rose under the leadership of the most active sailors, and arrested the officers of whom two were killed. The Red Flag was raised and the ship set out in search of the *Potemkin.*

It was a great tragedy for the crew of the *Prut* when they arrived at Odessa and found that the *Potemkin* had left for Roumania to disarm. Most of the command began to hesitate, feeling uncertain of their strength and of the result. After long arguments and discussions, the minority gave way to the majority, the Red Flag was hauled down, the officers were liberated, and the *Prut* set out for Sebastopol.

The defeated minority still held slight hopes that it would be able to cause a revolt in the whole squadron on arriving at Sebastopol. But alas, these hopes were fated to disappointment. On its way, the *Prut* was met by two torpedo-boats and taken under control. On arriving at Sebastopol, the crew of the *Prut* on the demand of Admiral Chukhnin, handed over forty-two of the "ring-leaders" who were sent for trial by court-martial.

The tsarist court meted out stern justice. Four were sentenced to death and thirty-eight to penal servitude. Although the defence and the court applied for mercy, Nikolai II left the matter to the discretion of Admiral Chukhnin, who confirmed the sentence as passed.

With the departure of the *Potemkin,* the police, the gendarmes, the tsarist generals and capitalists felt themselves to be masters of the situation, and carried out a devilish revenge on the revolting workers, repaying them for the terror and excitement they had forced them to live through.

We will not go into details as to the further fate of the cruiser *Potemkin* or describe its double journey to Roumania and its disarmament at Constance, but will conclude the story of its tragic struggle, with the words of Lenin:

"The passing of the *Potemkin* to the side of the rebellion, was the first step in converting the Russian Revolution into an international force, bringing it face to face with the European countries."

THE LESSONS OF THE MUTINY OF THE *POTEMKIN*

There were many causes for the defeat of the revolt on the cruiser *Potemkin.* The chief and most fundamental reasons were as follows:

In the first place, the masses of soldiers and sailors were not class-conscious, were backward, and had no experience whatever of revolutionary struggle. They were easily roused to hatred and anger against their oppressors, and to spontaneous protests and mutinies. They were easily fired by the flames of revolt, but they had no revolutionary stamina, firmness, reliability and determination; they were not prepared systematically, in a planned manner. In short, they had none of those qualities which are given by long political work in the process of the revolutionary class struggle and which are so necessary for a victorious armed rebellion.

Secondly, the leadership of the revolt was weak and incapable, not understanding the seriousness of the situation.

Without wasting valuable time, they should have immediately used their arms to catch the enemy unprepared, so disorganising it. But the leaders were not agreed on a single

question.. The Social-Democratic organisation of Odessa, consisting of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, was not prepared and did not show sufficient activity and determination. It did not even set up a leading military centre. At the moment when rapidity, decision and boldness were necessary, as one of the contemporaries bitterly states, there was only a foolish, helpless and mistaken attitude of waiting for "something."

In general, neither the leaders of the workers' organisations, nor the leaders of the sailors held in the slightest degree to the golden rule which had long before been pointed out by Marx, as to how a victorious revolt ought to be organised.

"Revolt, like war, is a science," said he, "and therefore we should never 'play at rebelling' but once we have commenced, we should know thoroughly that we have to carry it through to the end.

"It is necessary to collect a great superiority of forces at the decisive spot, at the decisive moment, otherwise the enemy, who has better organisation, will destroy the rebels.

"Once the rebellion has commenced, it is necessary to act with the greatest determination and immediately take up the offensive. Defence is the death-blow to an armed rebellion.

"We must try to catch the enemy unawares. . . . Every day some successes, however small, must be obtained, so as to maintain moral superiority at all costs."

Lenin, throughout the whole course of his revolutionary activity, untiringly urged these golden rules of Marx on our Bolshevik comrades. Therefore, under his talented leadership we conquered in October 1917.

On the other hand, in all the events which took place in Odessa, there can clearly be seen the imprint of Menshevik tactics, according to which a revolt is a process. They tried to utilise the revolt of the cruiser for agitation, for arousing the masses against the autocracy, but they did not wish to take the responsibility for organising a revolt, making technical preparations for it, or giving it the necessary correct leadership.

The Bolshevik organisation as well, was too weak to take charge of the rebellion.

Comrade Shapovalov, who was in Odessa at the time of the *Potemkin* mutiny, gave the following account of the situation in the Social-Democratic organisations:

"The joint commission (composed of representatives of the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks and the Bund) committed an inexcusable mistake when they decided to direct the actions of the cruiser from the shore. On the first day they lost six hours of valuable time in quarrels as to what to call their commission. The Bund and the General Sailors' Union on the first day proposed that the sailors should bombard the town and then send a landing party. The other representatives opposed the bombardment on the grounds that it was cruel. Then the sailors refused, very sensibly, to leave the ship before the arrival of the rest of the squadron. For two or three days, the commission and its representatives babbled irresolutely, and for humanitarian reasons set the officers free. During all this time the commission could not meet, owing to the attitude of the conciliators. They only met when one cruiser had gone and the other had surrendered. The workers of Odessa were waiting for the bombardment like manna from heaven, but the Social-Democrats, together with the bourgeoisie, were against the bombardment of the aristocratic quarters of the sea-front. Now reaction will set in because it can be seen that the organisation is weak. Oh, now it will be harder to drive out these intellectuals, the conciliators, the traitors to the workers."

This characterisation of the events, given by a Bolshevik workingman, contains many hard phrases written under the influence of a natural irritation against the opportunist actions of the organisation. On the whole, it is undoubtedly correct.

Lenin was abroad in exile, and followed the development of events in Odessa with the greatest intensity and interest and even took steps to send the best Bolshevik comrades to lead the revolt, giving them instructions and directions.

But before these comrades (Vassiliev, Yuzhin), sent by Lenin, could arrive, the struggle was over.

In an article in the Bolshevik organ, *Proletary*, Lenin gave the following estimate of the events at Odessa:

"The tremendous significance of the recent events at Odessa, lies in the fact that for the first time a large unit of the military forces of tsarism—a whole armoured cruiser —came over openly to the side of the revolution.

"There was much in the movement which was undeveloped, and in the events at Odessa there were many of the features of the old mutinies. But they signify that the first waves of the flood have already reached the very threshold of the strongholds of the autocracy."

In analysing these events further, Lenin in the same article draws the following instructive lessons:

"From the troops themselves, detachments of the revolutionary army are formed. The business of these detachments is to declare a rebellion, to give *military leadership* to the masses, which is necessary for civil war as for every other war, to form base points for an open struggle throughout the country, to transfer the revolt to neighbouring districts, to assure complete political freedom—even if only on a small part of the territory of the country at first—to commence the revolutionary reconstruction of the decayed system of the autocracy, to develop the creative efforts of the rank and file to the full.

"A revolutionary army is necessary, because great historical questions can be settled only by force, but the organisation of force in a modern struggle is a military organisation."

These quotations from an article written by Lenin twenty-five years ago retain their full force up to date. They might have been written but yesterday, with regard to the heroic struggle of the Red Army in China, or with regard to any other country, where the great struggle of the toilers for their freedom is going on.

More than ten years after these events, in one of his speeches made while abroad, Lenin again returned to the question of the methods of armed struggle by the rebellious revolutionary troops against the tsarist government. As an example, Lenin again gives the episode from the revolt of the Black Sea Fleet at Sebastopol:

"Permit me to relate to you in detail one little episode in the mutiny of the Black Sea Fleet, in order to give you a concrete picture of events at the apex of their development.

"Gatherings of revolutionary workers and sailors were being organised more and more frequently. Since men in the armed forces were not permitted to attend workers' meetings, the workers began in masses to visit the military meetings. They gathered in thousands. The idea of joint action found a lively response. The most class-conscious companies elected deputies.

"Then the military authorities decided to take action. The attempts of some of the officers to deliver 'patriotic' speeches at the meetings had failed miserably. The seamen, who were accustomed to debating, put their officers to shameful flight. After these efforts had failed. it was decided to prohibit meetings altogether. In the morning of November 24, 1905, a company of sailors, in full war kit, was posted at the gate of the naval barracks. Rear-Admiral Pisarevsky, in a loud voice, gave the order: 'Permit no one to leave the barracks! In case of disobedience, shoot!' A sailor, named Petrov, stepped forth from the ranks of the company that received that order, loaded his rifle in view of all, and with one shot killed Lieutenant-Colonel Stein of the Brest-Litovsk Regiment, and with another wounded Rear-Admiral Pisarevsky. The command was given: 'Arrest him!' Nobody budged. Petrov threw his rifle to the ground and exclaimed: 'Why don't you move? Take me!' He was arrested. The seamen, who rushed from every side, angrily demanded his release, and declared that they vouched for him. Excitement ran high.

" 'Petrov, the shot was an accident, wasn't it?' asked one of the officers, trying to find a way out of the situation.

" 'What do you mean, an accident? I stepped forward, loaded and took aim. Is that an accident?'

" 'They demand your release. . . .'

"And Petrov was released. The seamen, however, were not content with that; all officers on duty were arrested, disarmed, and taken to company headquarters. . . Seamen delegates, about forty in number, conferred throughout the whole night. The decision was to release the officers, but never to permit them to enter the barracks again.

"This little incident shows you clearly how events developed in the majority of the mutinies. The revolutionary ferment among the people could not but spread to the armed

forces. It is characteristic that the leaders of the movement came from those elements in the navy and the army, which had been recruited mainly from the industrial workers and possessed most technical training, for instance, the sappers. The broad masses, however, were still too naive, their mood was too passive, too good-natured, too Christian. They flared up rather quickly; any case of injustice, excessively harsh conduct on the part of the officers, bad food, etc., was enough to call forth a revolt. There was no persistence in their protest; they lacked a clear perception of aim; they lacked a clear understanding of the fact that only the most vigorous continuation of the armed struggle, only a victory over all the military and civil authorities, only the overthrow of the government and the seizure of power throughout the whole State could guarantee the success of the revolution.

"The broad masses of the seamen and soldiers were easily roused to revolt. But with equal light-heartedness they foolishly released the arrested officers. They allowed themselves to be pacified by promises and persuasion on the part of their officers; in this way the officers gained precious time, obtained reinforcements, broke the ranks of the rebels, and then the most brutal suppression of the movement and the execution of the leaders followed."

The revolt on the cruiser *Potemkin* in 1905, was one of the object lessons of the revolutionary struggle, in which the broad masses of workers and peasants, and particularly the sailors and soldiers were trained in the methods of the revolutionary fight, and the concrete tactics of armed revolt. The Bolsheviks generalised these concrete lessons and drew the necessary conclusions with regard to the further preparations for the overthrow of tsarism.

The victory of the workers and peasants in October 1917, was due not only to favourable international and internal political circumstances, but chiefly to the fact that they were led by our Communist Party, with Lenin at its head—a Party which had gathered tremendous experience in the struggle against the autocratic government during the 1905 Revolution, in the years of reaction and retreat, and especially during the time of the opportunist bourgeois government of Kerensky.